

elementary school teacher with the San Diego Unified School District. She may be retiring from teaching, but she is definitely not retiring as a community leader.

Virginia was raised in Camarillo, CA. She was widowed while still a young woman, and came to San Diego in 1971. She began her liberal arts studies at San Diego State University, and it was there that I met her.

Virginia has managed to combine her career as a dedicated teacher of second and third grade students and mother of three children with a second career as a San Diego Educators' Association (SDEA) union activist and community leader. Over the years, she has been involved in more causes and struggles than can be mentioned here. Among them are opposition to the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, support for victims of the death squads in El Salvador, support for affirmative action, and participation in voter registration campaigns for new citizens.

Virginia's activism continues to the present. As part of the Older Women's Project, she demonstrated against the invasion of Iraq. She is working with the San Diego labor movement to bring about a living wage ordinance for the city of San Diego. She is a leader in her labor union, the SDEA, having held the position of Human Rights Chair, an elected delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly in 2001, and is currently a member of the Political Involvement Committee.

On the occasion of her retirement, Virginia wrote a farewell letter to the parents of her students. This letter expresses as well as anyone can the reasons she tries so hard to help create a better world.

The letter reads:

DEAR PARENTS: Our last day is upon us at Clay Elementary School. We, in Room 4, have been working hard to become prepared for the challenges ahead. These few years, particularly, have been trying times in news and heavily concentrated in the area of education. For many of us, working more hours to fulfill our responsibilities for our children have become necessary. The world has entered our homes in the news, and much of it is difficult for us to understand. In our schools, we are wondering how our children will fare with the problems that concern public education due to difficult economic times in the state of California. Yet, in spite of these extraordinary times, Room 4 students have been working cooperatively to prepare for the difficult times by doing their part as better readers and citizens in order to meet those challenges.

We have learned in reading that nonfiction literature—biography, science, and social studies—help us learn about the past in order to understand the present in the hopes of preparing for a better future. We learned that reading for understanding of past and present history helps us prepare to make those decisions. We are aware that this preparation will help us work toward a time, seemingly far away, but necessary, in order to preserve better conditions of life for our families, our communities, and possibly for those whom we don't know in other parts of the world.

Our world needs fixing. By reading about the environment, we learned that many studies are possible to help us prepare for knowledge and understanding about pollution and saving our natural resources. Careers in science and math will be necessary for making changes in these areas of studies. We are beginning to understand that it is of great importance to understand the present, in the hopes of affecting the future in posi-

tive ways. Social and environmental studies will help us to fix and create that better world.

We learned about early America and the struggles to build it. It took many kinds of citizens to change it for the better. We also learned that connection with other countries remains necessary to strengthen what we share now. Citizens here in America from all over the world are helping to enrich our way of life in their sharing of their cultures. Our students know that it is their job to continue their efforts to become those good, creative, and knowledgeable students to prepare for the challenges ahead.

Thank you for your part in seeing that your child continues to prepare to become that responsible citizen that you and I hope will contribute to our community. I have been privileged, hopefully, to help chart that course. It is especially meaningful for me this year of my retirement.

I look optimistically forward to your child's educational success in the future.

Most Sincerely,

VIRGINIA FRANCO,
3rd Grade Teacher.

This letter speaks to her commitment to the children she is teaching and to the larger community. Our world would be a better place if we all were as dedicated as Virginia. As she retires, I want to acknowledge a woman of conviction, dedicated both to her love of teaching and to her belief in the importance of individuals working to make a difference in this world.

My best wishes go to my good friend, Virginia Franco.

COMMENDING LEONARD R.
TOTORA

HON. STEVE ISRAEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 26, 2003

Mr. ISRAEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today with great pride and admiration to commend Leonard R. Totoro for his service in the United States Army.

At this time of conflict, stories like those of Mr. Totoro remind us of the courage the members of our Armed Forces have always displayed and continue to display on a daily basis. They are a testament to the dedication, honor and strength of the men and women in uniform. They deserve to be praised for generations to come.

After enlisting in the army at the age of 17, Mr. Totoro attended the Army School of Photography and then spent two years in Europe as a member of the Signal Corps, filming motion pictures for the military. With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, Mr. Totoro was assigned to General MacArthur's headquarters in Japan.

In Korea, Mr. Totoro served above and beyond the call of duty when he volunteered to jump 35 miles behind enemy lines with the 187th Airborne Rangers. Unfortunately, with no prior parachuting experience or training, Mr. Totoro suffered severe injuries to his right leg and ankle. Knowing how important the footage he was capturing was, Mr. Totoro initially refused medical treatment and remained with the 187th Airborne Rangers for many more hours.

Upon hearing the news of his heroic effort on the battlefield, UN Supreme Commander

General Ridgeway awarded Mr. Totoro paratrooper wings with a Battle Star. In addition to his paratrooper wings, Mr. Totoro was awarded the Bronze Star for bravery against the enemy.

I commend Mr. Leonard Totoro for his dedication and service to his country and for the bravery, honor and valor he displayed during his service in the Army.

MAJOR GEORGE WINTON
THOMPSON

HON. NICK J. RAHALL II

OF WEST VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 26, 2003

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, alumni of Woodrow Wilson High School Class of 1958 will congregate in Beckley, West Virginia. They gather to celebrate the 45 years passing after the graduation of 343 students.

My alma matter, Woodrow Wilson High School, so named in 1917, traces its roots to July 13, 1900. The school mascot is a flying bald eagle and the enrollment of the school is identified as the Flying Eagles. As the bald eagle is a majestic bird, it is also an independent creature. Eagles nest but they do not flock. It was therefore preordained that the alumni of this school separate and spread to the four corners of our great Nation and beyond.

The year 1958 represents a very different time with American citizens living under different standards. The Universal Military Training Act defined one of those standards. Under this Act, able-bodied male citizens past the age of 18 years were subject to six years of military training and duty. The United States Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps thereby benefited with the coming of age by Woodrow Wilson alumni. One chapter of the military contribution made by the Class of 1958 can be found in the Vietnam War. West Virginia sacrificed more sons on a per capita basis in the Vietnam War effort than any other state in the Union. Vietnam in wartime was where some 1958 graduates celebrated their 10th year beyond graduation. By the end of the Vietnam War, these alumni had returned to their homes and families, except one. This Flying Eagle was reported as missing-in-action on May 16, 1966, when the AC-47 gun ship he was navigating failed to return from a mission. At the time of his last action, the young man who had interrupted his studies at West Virginia University to serve his country held the rank of 1st Lieutenant in the United States Air Force. When the exchange of prisoners of war took place following the Vietnam War, this airman was not among the repatriated. During the following years, the airman's mother was encouraged by our government not to relinquish hope. She mailed letters and packages for years. None of the letters or packages were either acknowledged or returned. During these same years, the airman received posthumous promotions up to the rank of major. The mystery surrounding this Class of 1958 Flying Eagle was not resolved until November 24, 1999, when his recovered remains were positively identified. His remains, along with the remains of seven additional crewmembers on the ill-fated military aircraft, were obtained from the crash site during three separate collections during 1995, 1996, and 1997. The recovered remains of all eight crewmembers